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BASILIDES, A PATH TO PLOTINUS

BY

MONTSERRAT JUFRESA

Basilides is the oldest Gnostic thinker known to us from reliable sources. According to Clement,[1] Basilides lived in Alexandria during the reign of Hadrian, that is, in the first half of the second century after Christ.

It is well known that the account of Basilides' doctrine, as it has been transmitted to us by Hippolytus' *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* or *Elenchos*,[2] has been a subject of discussion and perplexity among the scholars since the manuscript containing this lost work of the ancient bishop of Rome appeared in a monastery on Mount Athos in the last century.

The long exposition of Basilides' thought which Hippolytus offered did not agree either with the data found in the other Church Fathers (Clement, Irenaeus, Epiphanius) or with a fragment of Basilides in Hegemonius' *Acta Archelai*. These facts led the name of Pseudo-Basilides being given to the author preserved by Hippolytus, and this was indeed De Faye's opinion at the beginning of this century.[3]

The position of the critics changed later and they tried to reconcile the apparently opposite sources in a unified system,[4] ascribing the discrepancies to the presumably incomplete information used by the Church Fathers.

Hippolytus' account is a great cosmogonic myth, structured in a syncretistic way, as is usual in the Gnostic literature. Our purpose is to focus on one aspect: the Supreme Divinity. The God that Basilides conceived shares an important number of features with the Plotinian One. Although this fact has been noted by some scholars,[5] it still deserves more accurate and specific attention, because the relationship between Plotinus and the Gnostic world remains an open question in the history of the spiritual evolution in the early centuries after Christ.

> ἦν, φησίν,[6] ὅτε ἦν οὐδέν, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ τὸ οὐδὲν ἦν τι τῶν ὄντων, ἁλλὰ ψιλῶς ... ἦν ὅλως οὐδὲ ἕν ... ἔστι γάρ, φησίν, ἐκεῖνο οὐχ ἁπλῶς ἄρρητον, ὃ ὀνομάζεται· ἄρρητον γοῦν αὐτὸ καλοῦμεν, ἐκεῖνο δὲ

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οὐδὲ ἄρρητον· καὶ γὰρ τὸ οὐδ' ἄρρητον οὐκ ἄρρητον ὀνομάζεται, ἀλλὰ ἔστι, φησίν, ὑπεράνω παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου.

... ἐπεὶ οὖν οὐδὲν ἦν, οὐχ ὕλη, οὐκ οὐσία, οὐκ ἀνούσιον, οὐχ ἁπλοῦν, οὐ σύνθετον, οὐκ ἀνόητον, οὐκ ἀναίσθητον, οὐκ ἄνθρωπος, οὐκ ἄγγελος, οὐ θεός, οὐδὲ ὅλως τι τῶν ὀνομαζομένων ἢ δι' αἰσθήσεως λαμβανομένων ἢ νοητῶν πραγμάτων ...

ὁ οὐκ ὢν θεός, ὃν Ἀριστοτέλης καλεῖ νόησις νοήσεως, ... ἀνοήτως, ἀναισθήτως, ἀβούλως, ἀπροαιρέτως, ἀπαθῶς, ἀνεπιθυμήτως κόσμον ἠθέλησε ποιῆσαι. τὸ δὲ ἠθέλησε λέγω, φησί, σημασίας χάριν, ἀθελήτως καὶ ἀνοήτως καὶ ἀναιθήτως. κόσμον δὲ οὐ τὸν κατὰ πλάτος καὶ διαίρεσιν γεγενημένον ὕστερον καὶ διεστῶτα, ἀλλὰ γὰρ σπέρμα κόσμου.

Then, Basilides has described God as:

1. not even ineffable.
2. lacking any attribute which could be expressed by a name.
3. completely aside from everything we can reach through our senses or our mind.
4. without being.
5. without any thought or consciousness.
6. without will.
7. deprived of any passion and emotion.
8. nevertheless, creator of the world.

Saying God is not even ineffable is a very curious expression. The frequent speculation of that time, considered by some scholars as commonplace, refers to God as ineffable. The idea that the names are related to the objects which they represent by nature and not by convention, an idea shared in the time by Platonists, Stoics and Pythagoreans, leads easily to the conclusion that, assuming the majesty of the Supreme Being, none of the names can define this Being accurately, and only the human necessity to understand forces men to give him a name. So, this idea appears in Philo,[7] in Albinus,[8] in the Hermetic texts,[9] in the Asclepius[10] (where we find the statement: God has no name, or better said, he has all the names), and in some Gnostic tractates.[11] But the best expression is in Plotinus:[12] "Thus, the One is in truth beyond all statement: any affirmation is of a thing, but "all-transcending, resting above even the most august divine Mind" this is the only true description, since it does not make it a thing among things, nor name it where no name could identify it; we can but try to indicate, in our feeble way, something concerning it."[13]

Basilides shares the conviction that there is no possibility for the human

language to express God in appropiated terms, but he has wanted to go even further saying that God is "not even ineffable". Why? As Wolfson[14] and Whittaker[15] pointed out, we have to suppose that Basilides with this assertion is trying to oppose someone who before him has said: God is ineffable. But, who could this "someone" be? According to Wolfson, Basilides should refer specifically to Philo, because he is the first known to us to have applied the word "ineffable" to God. Whittaker supposes that Basilides is acting against an undetermined Middle-Platonic environment. But, we may ask, why might Basilides oppose the Platonists, if he shares in so many ways their most important conceptions? I think that we can find a better explanation if we consider this "not even ineffable God" as a specific Gnostic[16] characteristic of Basilides, who tries with this expression to differentiate his Supreme Being from the God of the Bible.

As a matter of fact the expression "Ineffable Name" came forth from the Jewish people after the second destruction of Jerusalem's Temple, in which was conserved, written, the sacred Name of God, pronounced once a year by the Great Priest in a solemn and magnificent ceremony.[17] The destruction of the Temple carried the loss of the correct manner of pronouncing God's Name, and the Jews have since referred to him as the "Ineffable", alluding to the material impossibility of pronouncing God's Name as a reflection of his infinite excellence above all created beings. This interpretation seems confirmed by the fact that Basilides further[18] designates as "Ineffable" the Great Archon of the Ogdoas, whom we can in some aspects identify with the biblical God.

Now we shall consider the concept "not-being God". From Dodd's classic article in 1928[19] and Whittaker's more recent in 1969[20] we know that, during the first century before Christ and the two centuries after, some of the Platonist and Neopythagorean philosophers speculated as to whether the First Principle should be deemed as beyond the being. It seems the Neopythagorean were first to propose this interpretation,[21] in order to strengthen at the same time the unity of the First Monad and the otherness of the Indefinite Dyad. This interpretation would have been appropriated by the Platonic school, closely tied with the Neopythagorean at the epoch of the first empire.[22] But the culmination of this idea is, obviously, the Plotinian One, described as "superior than anything we know as Being, fuller and greater".[23] Plotinus' statement was reinforced by Porphyry[24] defining the One as "not-Being beyond being".

We must interpret Basilides' definition of the "not-being God",[25] in the light of this Platonic–Pythagorean tradition, considering that in his case

"to be" does not signify existence, but finite being. The God conceived as "not being" means that he is above the limited nature of the existing beings, an assertion which implies that he is intrinsically infinite and radically different from everything involved in the world of being. The definition means, therefore, to confirm this Being's unity and absolute freedom. Nevertheless, in the case of Basilides, we should ask whether a second purpose could be interposed, a definite intention to contrast the "being God" of the Bible.[26]

In regard of the denial of God's intellectual activity, Basilides uses the term ἀνοητῶς. We can also find it in some Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean writers,[27] but the most widespread tendency also found in the Hermetic and in the Gnostic texts is to consider God as a Mind.[28] Plotinus, who conceives the One as being supranoetic, explains in these terms the motives leading to deny the existence of an intelligent First Principle: "The Intellectual Principle is established in multiplicity, its intellection, self-sprung though it be, is in the nature of something added to it (some accidental dualism) and makes it multiple: the utterly simplex and therefore first of all beings, must, then, transcend the Intellectual Principle, and obviously, if this had intellection, it would no longer transcend the Intellectual Principle but be it, and at once be a multiple".[29]

Plotinus is also obliged to deny that the Supreme Principle has any knowledge of himself, because it would imply a contradiction to its absolute simplicity. Plotinus says: "The knowing principle itself cannot remain simplex, especially in the act of self-knowing, all silent though its self-perception be, it is dual to itself. Of course, The One has no need of minute self-handling, since it has nothing to learn by an intellective act, it is in full possession of its being before Intellect exists".[30]

Coming back to Basilides, after the denial of knowledge in God, he continues with the denial of consciousness, by which we are compelled to consider those conditions to be closely related. Although the distinction between thought and consciousness of the thought goes back to Chrysippus, the denial of a consciousness in the First Principle does not appear until Plotinus. The statement of that question in the *Enneades* will help us to understand clearly what Basilides possibly intended to say. Plotinus wrote: "The One is without self-perception, without self-consciousness and ignorant of himself"[31] and "A reader will often be quite unconscious when he is most intent: in a feat of courage there can be no sense either of the brave action or of the fact that all that is done conforms to the rules of courage. So that it would even seem that consciousness tends to blunt

the activities upon which it is exercised, and that in the degree in which these pass unobserved they are purer and have more effect, more vitality, and that, consequently, the Proficient arrived at this state has the truer fullness of life, life not spilled out in sensation but gathered closely within itself".[32]

In a similar way, therefore, we must suppose that the existence of consciousness in the God of Basilides would go against his absolute unity and indivisibility.

In order to express the next characteristic of God, that is, the lacking of will, Basilides uses three different words, ἀβούλως, ἀπροαιρέτως, ἀθελήτως, which surely means that he considers this point highly important. Only "to use an expression", that is, for the sake of better understanding, Basilides condescends to use the verbal form ἠθέλησε, "he wanted", referring to God in the act of the creation.

This time, indeed, only Plotinus can help us with a parallel statement and a longer explanation.[33] The *Enneade* VI, 8,22,7 ss. is devoted to the difficult problem of the One's will, with frequent allusions to the difficulties of language that this carries. Plotinus says[34] that in truth the One is above will, but for the sake of conveying conviction, at some cost of verbal accuracy, we are to allow activities in the Supreme and make them depend upon will. Nevertheless we do not have to understand this will as a power of election, because outside him nothing exists capable of compelling or attracting him. We must understand, as Plotinus says elsewhere: "The One can neither have yielded assent nor uttered decree nor stirred in any way towards an existence of a secondary ...we have to conceive what rises from the One as circumradiation... and may be compared to the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that unchanging substance".[35]

In a corresponding manner I think that we have to understand the apparent contradiction which Basilides incurs saying that God, being without will, "wanted" to create the world. Basilides refuses in an explicit way to assimilate the act of creating by God with the conscious and deliberate work of the craftsman, he does not even accept a parallel between God and his creation and the inner production of the web by the spider.[36] These examples imply intentionality that would introduce an element of duality in God. God, in acting like the craftsman or the spider, would be "moved" towards something.

In order to elude this difficulty Basilides, like Plotinus, seems to have wanted to explain the creation as a process of natural production, derived

from the special and unique being of God.[37] As we shall see further, Basilides borrowed from the Stoics the terms of this process of natural production.

It is not necessary to emphasize that the conception of a Divinity who creates without willingness constitutes one of the most interesting aspects in the thought of Basilides. This is not a religious idea belonging to his Christian background nor to the texts of Middle Platonic philosophy known to us that deal with the problems of the human presence in the world.[38] Very different, indeed, is the *Asclepius*, which says that God is filled with his will.[39]

Basilides insists furthermore that the "not being God" does not have passions or emotions. This statement seems unnecessary, because it follows as a consequence of God's lack of knowledge and will. Thus, we may ask why Basilides thought it was necessary to insist on this aspect. It is possible that again we have here his special interest, as a Gnostic thinker, to differentiate his God from the Christian God who creates *ad majorem gloriam suam*, and from the Jewish God, capable of filling himself with anger or pleasure depending on how well humanity behaves. On the other hand, the subject of the ἀπαθεία of God evokes Epicurean echoes. But, what might have led Basilides to reatin those characteristics of the Epicurean gods, if gods in Epicureanism are material and multiple, so much different from the God described by Basilides? Perhaps because, according to Lucretius, *uolgi de dis opiniones esse prauas et impias*[40] or, quoting Epicurus himself, "impious is the man sho shares with the masses the opinions about gods".[41] The elitism contained in these statements, which in the *Letter to Menoeceus* is connected with the lack of feelings of gods in relation to humans, agrees perfectly with the belief that the Gnostic thinkers have with regard to their own superiority.[42]

We shall see, now, in short, in what manner the processes of creation developed according to Basilides. The cosmic seed, he says, contained within it a Triple Filiation. The First, the lightest, as soon as the seed was established, raised up to the "not Being", charmed by his extraordinary beauty and grace. The Second Filiation wanted to imitate the First, but, because by itself it was heavier than the First, needed to be helped in its rise by the Holy Ghost, which Basilides names also the *Pneuma* and the Intermediate *Pneuma*. The Third Filiation, which needed to be purified, stood in the great mass of the cosmic seed, in order to give and to receive benefits. Later and succesively, from the cosmic seed came forth the Great Archon who presides over the Ogdoas, that is, the universe above the

moon, the Second Archon who presides over the Hebdomas, that is, the universe beneath the moon, and, at last, the earthly creatures.[43]

The first thing that catches our attention in this myth is the image of the cosmic seed. This word has a long tradition in the history of Greek philosophy before Basilides' time. Anaxagoras called his ultimate particles "seeds" (σπέρματα)[44] and so all things must have grown from the initial condition in which all the seeds were together. The Epicureans also called the atoms "seeds" or "generative bodies", and Epicurus said a cosmos comes to be when seeds of the right kind come together.[45] Aristotle refers to the atomic elements of Leucippus and Democritus collectively as a πανσπερμία.[46] The Pythagoreans, on the other hand, seem to have thought the cosmos grew from the unit as a seed. This unit-seed began to inhale the infinite void surrounding it, and, by imposing a limit on it, produced the cosmos.[47] The early Stoics called the fire of the conflagration, which is the same as the fire from which the cosmos originates, the seed, *sperma*, of the future cosmos.[48] A later Neopythagorean Nichomachus of Gerasa, who was possibly a contemporary of Basilides, equated God to the Monad and said that he was seminally all things in Nature.[49] In the Christian tradition the image of the seed appears in the parable of the "mustard seed". In Basilides, all those traditions seem to coexist. Sometimes he refers to a unique seed, which he compares to an egg, an image belonging to the Pythagorean background,[50] sometimes he uses the terms σωρός[51] and πανσπερμία, words which seem better to recall the atomist tradition, and we find also a big comparison between the development of the creation and the growth of the plant from the mustard seed. Nevertheless it appears clearly that Basilides conceived this first moment of the creation having in mind the opposition God – materia that we find in the Pythagorean conception of the Monad limiting the Indefinite Dyad,[52] and also the two Stoic ἀρχαί, the active principle, τὸ ποιοῦν, equated with God, and the passive principle, τὸ πάσχον, equated with matter.[53]

The Stoic element is, indeed, the most important in Basilides' cosmogony. The idea that "fire is a seed possessing the *logoi* of all things and the causes of events, past, present and future",[54] besides the conception of God as a fire,[55] allowed Basilides to deny any purpose in God and, at the same time, to state that all the things were established by God in the cosmic seed, setting aside any inferior creator.[56]

The next important thing in Basilides account is the Triple Filiation.[57] Doubtless, those Filiations must represent the different levels in the spiritual world which in the Platonic speculation of the time cover the

distance between the spiritual and the material world, that is, the Divine Mind and the World Soul. The Filiations are said to be consubstantial with the non–being God, but the fact that they came forth from the seed, and not directly from God, seems to indicate that they belong unmistakably to the reign of being, although within it they occupy the highest places. Thus Basilides by these means preserves and fortifies the absolute transcendence of the First Principle.

The term Filiation in itself could have been suggested by the Christian–Gnostic background of Basilides, although in Numenius, the Neopythagorean philosopher contemporary of him, we find a similar terminology: he named his three gods Grand-Father, Son, and Grand-Son.[58] But the fact that the word "Filiation" is of feminine gender in greek, ἡ υἱότης, reminds to us that in some Gnostic myths the second principle after the Supreme God is a feminine figure.[59]

The account of Basilides contains enough elements to carry out the identification, mentioned before, of the First Filiation as a Divine Mind, and the Second Filiation as a Universal Soul. The evidence that, I think, allows to us to identify the First Filiation with the Divine Mind is the homeric expression: ὡς εἰ πτερὸν ἠὲ νόημα (as a wing or a thought, *Od.* 7,36) with which Basilides compares the raising of the First Filiation up to the "not-being God". The reference to the wing must be interpreted as an allusion to Eros, the Love, who in the *Phaedrus* leads to the contemplation of the Supreme Beauty.[60]

The evidence which leads to a recognition of the Second Filiation as a Soul in the myth of Basilides is its close connection with *Pneuma*. The Stoics identified the heat or the *pneuma* of the body with the soul, [61] but I think that in this case Basilides borrowed some Aristotelian concepts belonging to a biological context, and adapted them to the world of transcendent beings. In explaining how soul is transmitted from father to child through the seed, Aristotle states: "In every case there is present in the semen that which makes seeds in general fertile, namely the substance called 'the hot'. This is not fire or some such power, but the *pneuma*, a substance analogous to the elements of the stars".[62] On other occasions Aristotle also suggests that these physical substances are "tools" of the soul and that the pneuma is the soul's instrument which causes movement.[63]

I think that this description fits very well with the function of the *Pneuma* in Basilides' narration. If the *Pneuma* is "the hot", we understand that it can be very helpful in a process of rising, if it is "analogous to the

matter of the stars", it is justificable to fix it, as Basilides does later, as the last sky of the cosmos. Finally, if the *pneuma* is the "tool" of the soul, the Second Filiation, which is helped by the *Pneuma*, has to be Soul.[64]

The Third Filiation, which needed to be purified and stood in the seed in order "to give and receive benefits" reminds us of the Plotinian concept of Nature,[65] the lowest part of the World Soul, mixed with matter and giving to it the benefit of life and movement, while the superior part, in our text represented by the Second Filiation, contemplates the Divine Mind. But further statements in Hippolytus' account make it clear[66] that the Third Filiation represents a more genuine Gnostic concept: the Sons of God, that is, the pneumatics. The pneumatics, the elected men, are this part of the Divine Soul captured by matter and not able to disengage from it. They are waiting for the coming of the Redeemer who will liberate them and permit them to recover their dwelling place in the Superior World.

We have seen, thus, that, in order tot strengthen the "otherness" of God, the generative process of the material world, but also of the spiritual beings, has been conceived by Basilides in terms of an automatic materialism, clearly related with Stoic cosmogonies.[67] The rising of the Filiations and their different weight recalls the processes of evaporation and condensation by which the Stoics[68] explained the consecutive births and destructions of the cosmos. Basilides has retained from this model the process of birth, but not the destruction of the cosmos. For him, following at that point the Platonists, the cosmos is eternal.

There is still one more aspect in the conception of Basilides' God that I think is worth comment. The passionate description of the transcendence of this God "unknowable by any natural way we can afford",[69] doubtless reflects an inner and personal experience of Basilides, and, thus, his strong mystic accent has been rightly pointed out by G. Quispel.[70]

Referring to Plotinus, the importance of the mystical component of his philosophy has been widely recognized and discussed. We thus need only ask if there is any special characteristic in common between the mysticism of our authors. Although so much has been written about Plotinus, I think that one of the best recent approaches to him is due to J. M. Rist, and I agree with his assessments. According to Rist, Plotinus' mysticism can be clearly seen to be of a theistic type, in Zaehner's sense of the word,[71] it is to say, the kind of mysticism where the isolated soul attains to union and is "oned" with a transcendent God, though *a fortiori* it is not itself identical with that God. In Rist's opinion the Plotinian meta-

phors to explain the ascent of the soul, the metaphors of sight, touch, and love, express that the soul is surrendered to God, that it is enraptured, it is filled with God, but that it is not, however, annihilated in God. The soul is not identical with God, although its likeness with God has been pushed as far as possible. The general position of Plotinus is that there is an "otherness" which separates the products of the One from the One itself, and this position is not changed even at the last period of the mystical union.

The evidences that we have about Basilides do not allow us to reconstruct the way in which he conceived the different stages of the ascent of the soul, although we know that he was prone to asceticism and that he considered suffering as a way of purification. Nevertheless in accord to his cosmogony in which all the things had issued from the seed and not directly from God we must suppose the mysticism of Basilides to be of a theistic type. Basilides says that the Third Filiation, when at last purified, rises up to a place close to the "not-being God". That probably means that the elected man who finds insights of God through a spiritual intuition,[72] never has his soul, although it lies in closest proximity to God, fused with God or dissolved into his non-being. The "otherness" of God, even at the culminant moment of the mystical encounter, has been preserved by Basilides.

In conclusion thus I think we are allowed to accept that the characteristics of God in Basilides are clearly depending on a Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean speculation, although original features can be detected in some aspects. On the other hand, his cosmogonic conceptions find inspiration in a Stoic doctrine.

Furthermore the conception of God in Basilides is very similar to the Plotinian One, in spite of the different level of complexity in the two authors. We cannot state if Plotinus depends on Basilides, but because Plotinus was living in Alexandria only several decades after Basilides did, we can suppose that they were in some way connected to a similar philosophic milieu. We can say, at least, that Basilides represents one more link in the long chain which leads from Plato – through Eudorus, Moderatus, Numenius and surely more philosophers unknown to us – to the resplendent One of Plotinus.

NOTES

[1] Clem. Al. *Strom.* 7, 17; also Epiph. *Contra haereses* 24, 6, 72 C.

[2] Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 7, 20–27, ed. P. Wendland (Leipzig 1916). The work is also known as *Philosophumena*.

[3] E. De Faye, *Gnostiques et Gnosticisme* (Paris 1913).

[4] P. J. G. A. Hendrix, *De alexandrijnsche Haeresiarch Basilides* (Amsterdam 1926). Hendrix supposed that the Church Fathers were more interested in the moral doctrines of Basilides and that Hippolytus reflected the metaphysical speculations. A. Siouville, the French translator of Hippolytus' *Refutation* (Paris 1928) still believed that the source of Hippolytus' account was a text from the Basilidian school, written at the end of the II century A.D.

[5] W. R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus* (London–New York [3]1929) 107.

[6] There was a time, he says, when nothing was, nor was even the nothing anything existing, but simply ..... nothing at all was... because what is so termed is not absolutely ineffable; we call it "ineffable", and it is "not even ineffable", because the "not even ineffable" is not called ineffable, but is superior to any name than can be named. ... Since, there was nothing therefore, not matter, not being, nor not-being, nor anything simple, nor anything composed, nor anything non-composed, nor non-perceptible, nor man, nor angel, nor God, nor anything at all of the things that can be named, perceived or thought ... then the not-being God, whom Aristotle calls "knowledge of knowledge" ... without thinking, without perception, without intention, without resolve, without emotion, without desire, wanted to create the world. I, says Basilides, say "wanted" but to make myself clear because he was without willing, without thought, without consciousness... and by world, I do not mean the world which later arose by expansion and division in its present order, but the seed of the world. Hipp. *Haer.* 7, 20–21. (I quoted, with some modifications, from R. Haardt *Gnosis. Character and Testimony* (Leiden 1971) 44–45, translated into English by J. F. Hendry).

[7] Philo *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* 170.

[8] Alb. *Intr.* 10, 4.

[9] God is ἀνώνυμος, *CH* 5, 1, 9, 10.

[10] *Asclepius* 20.

[11] "He is ineffable because no one could comprehend him to speak about him", *The Apocryphon of John* 2, 1, 15–20 (translated by F. Wisse in *The Nag Hammadi Library* [New York 1977] 100). "How shall we give thee a name? We do not have it. For thou art the existence of them all", *The Three steles of Seth* 7, 5, 125 (transl. by J. M. Robinson in *loc.cit.* 363).

[12] Plot. 5, 3, 13, 1. (I used the edition of P. Henry et H. R. Schwyzer, *Plotini Opera* 1 [Paris-Bruxelles 1951]; 2 [id. 1959]; 3 [id. 1973]).

[13] The translations of Plotinus' text are quoted from S. MacKenna, *The Enneads* (London 1969).

[14] H. A. Wolfson, Negative attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides, *Harvard Theological Review* 50 (1957) 145–156.

[15] J. Whittaker, Basilides on the Ineffability of God, *Harvard Theological Review* 62 (1969) 367–371.

[16] The anti-judaic statements constitute one of the most distinctive features of the Gnostic thought. It has even been considered by some scholars as an essential datum in order to enlighten the origins of Gnosticism. Cf. R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York [2]1966).

[17] Cf. J. Klauser, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York 1959) 47. The *Toldoth Jesu*, a popular Jewish tale about Jesus' life, accuses him of having learned, through deception, the Ineffable Name of God.

[18] Hipp. *Haer.* 7, 24.

[19] E. R. Dodds, The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One, *Classical Quaterly* 22 (1928) 129–142.

[20] J. Whittaker, ΕΙΙΕΚΕΙΝΑ ΝΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΟΥΣΙΑΣ, *Vigiliae Christianae* 23 (1969) 91–104.

[21] The most important evidence is the fragment which refers to Moderatus and has been conserved in Simplicius *In Phys.* 230, 34 ff Diels. Moderatus is supposed to have been living in the second half of the first century A.D.

[22] Cf. J. M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (Ithaca, New York 1977) 341.

[23] Plot. 5, 3, 14, 16–19.

[24] Porphyry, *Sent.* 26: τὸ μὴ ὂν ὑπὲρ τὸ ὄν. The expression referred to the First Principle is also found in Marius Victorinus, *Ad Candidum* 4. Cf. the chapter devoted to the Plotinian One in J. M. Rist, *Plotinus . The road to reality* (Cambridge 1967).

[25] On the Gnostic side some of the Coptic tractates in the Nag Hammadi Library provide the same definition of God. The *Allogenes* 11, 3, 61–62, states: "He lives without Mind, or Life, or Existence, incomprehensibly", "He is better than the Totalities in his privation and unknowability, that is, the non-being Existence", "since he is limitless and powerless, and non-existent, he was not giving being, rather he contains all of these in himself, being at rest". (Translated by J. D. Turner and O. S. Wintermute in *The Nag Hammadi Library, loc. cit.* 445). Some peculiarities of the Coptic text of this tractate suggest that the original composition was in Greek, that it was in existence in the third century and was translated into Coptic near Alexandria about 300 A.D. Because the date attributed to it seems to be posterior to Basilides and Plotinus, we will leave aside in this paper the specific relationship, interesting and worth investigating, between our authors and the Nag Hammadi Codices.

[26] Probably against LXX, *Exodus* 3 : 14 : καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς Μωϋσῆν, λέγων· Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν, as it has been suggested by J. Whittaker, *loc. cit.* 100.

[27] Among the Neopythagorean dealing with a supranoetic First Principle Whittaker, *loc. cit.* 95, quotes Pseudo Brotinus who, although he commonly is considered a contemporary of Numenius, has been dated by H. Thesleff to the III-II century B.C.

[28] *The Apocryphon of John* 12, 1,4 names him "Knowledge giving knowledge", and the *Allogenes* 11, 3, 63 says: "He is primary revelation and knowledge of himself, as it is he alone who knows himself". There is some vacillation in this tractate which previously stated thad God lived without Mind.

[29] Plot. 5, 3, 11, 25–30.

[30] Plot. 5, 3, 10, 44–48.

[31] Plot. 5, 3, 13, 6–8.

[32] Plot. 1, 4, 10, 24–33.

[33] The *Allogenes* 11, 3, 65 says, too, that God exists in himself without desire.

[34] Plot. 6,8, 13.

[35] Plot. 5, 1, 6, 25–30.

[36] Hipp. *Haer.* 7, 22.

[37] Basilides explicitly rejects the use of the concept "emanation" for describing this process.

[38] Albinus, *Intr.* 25 and Iamblichus, *De anima* (ap. Stob. 1, 377, 11 ff. ed Wachs.) – a passage referred to the Calvenus Taurus' school – mention a specific βούλησις θεῶν directed to manifest gods' divinity through their works.

[39] *Asclepius* 20 : *semper uoluntatis praegnans suae parit semper quicquid uoluerit procreare.*

[40] Lucr. 1, 80–101; 5, 1183–1240.

[41] D.L. 10, 123.

[42] The Church Fathers clearly observed that the transcendent and indifferent

Gnostic God bears an unquestionable similarity with the Epicurean gods . Tertullian in *Ad. Marc.* 1, 25 says: *si aliquem de Epicuri schola deum affectauit Christi nomine titulari, ut quod beatum et incorruptibile sit, neque sibi neque alii molestias praestet, hanc enim sententiam ruminans Marcion remouit ab illo seueritates et iudiciarias uires*, and in *Ad. Marc.* 5, 4: *caeterum Deus ille otiosus, nec operationis, nec praedicationis ullius*, and in *loc. cit.* 5, 19: *atquin derideri potest Deus Marcionis, qui nec irasci nouit, nec ulcisci.*

[43] Hipp. *Haer.* 7, 22.

[44] DK 59 B 4.

[45] D.L. 10, 89: Lucr. 1, 58–60.

[46] DK 59 A 45, 67 A 15, 28.

[47] DK 58 B 26, 30.

[48] *SVF* 2. 596, 618.

[49] Ap. Iambl. *Theol. Ar.* p. 31 ff, ed. De Falco. Cf. J. M. Dillon, *loc. cit.* 355.

[50] DK 1 B 13.

[51] The idea of a Primeval Mound which contained within it all of that was to come is also found in the Egyptian cosmogonies. The high God Aton, the supreme God of Heliopolis, is said to have risen up as a High Hill. Cf. R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, paperback ed. (London 1978) 37.

[52] D.L. 8, 24–33; Sext. Emp. *Adv. Phys.* 2, 248–284.

[53] *SVF* 1. 85, 98, 495; 2. 301, 310, 312. For further information see D. H. Hahm, *The origins of Stoic Cosmology* (Ohio State University Press 1977) 58 ss.

[54] Zeno, *SVF* 1. 98; 1. 102 = 2. 580. The expression σπερματικὸς λόγος that the Stoics referred to God describes that function of God which is analogous to the function of the seed in the reproductive process.

[55] The identification between fire and God can be clearly seen in the well known passage of Dio Chrysostom, *SVF* 2. 622, which describes the Stoic cosmogony in terms of an allegorized myth.

[56] The two Archons in Basilides are creative powers, but they are not negative figures as in other Gnostic systems. The heavenly creatures are First Archon's works and the earthly creatures are Second Archon's works, but these Archons only execute things that already were in the universal seed. Basilides insists that the Archons are inferior to the Third Filiation which stays in the universal seed and says further that all beings were naturally born by addition from the great amount of the universal seed.

[57] The meaning of this Triple Filiation has been obscure for most of the scholars dealing with Basilides. E. De Faye, *loc. cit.*, considered this concept as something curious but inexplicable, "*même dans le contexte de l'époque*". At the beginning of this century, when the orientalized origins of Gnosticism were widely accepted, J. Kennedy, Buddhist Gnosticism, the System of Basilides, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London 1902) 377–415, intended to identify the Filiations with the three buddhist *gunas*, the intellectual principle, the emotional principle and the dark principle. Later G. Quispel, The Gnostic man: the doctrine of Basilides, in *Gnostic Studies* (Istanbul 1974) 103–133, searching for a more plausible explanation tried to connect the concept of the Triple Filiation with some texts of a similar period, mainly Arnobius 2, 25, and *Asclepius* 32. The passage in Arnobius treats of a God First Principle of all things, followed by two *mentes geminae* and an *anima docta inmortalis perfecta diuina*. Quispel believed the First and the Second Filiation to correspond to the *mentes geminae* as representing the archetypal and the instrumental ideas, and the Third Filiation to be the *anima diuina*, that is, the Gnostic Primeval Man. The passage in the *Asclepius*, a very difficult one, refers to four intellects in God, in a manner that I think does not allow it to be compared with Basilides' myth, in which is clearly said that the First and non-being God is not a Mind. In addition J. M. Dillon, The concept of two Intellects, *Phronesis* 18 (1973) 176–185, pointed out that although this second Mind of God which cares for the

instrumental ideas and performs in relation to the world a demiurgic function appears in some Middle and Neoplatonic texts; the most widespread tendency is to attribute this function to the World Soul. Calcidius' statement in *In Tim.* 177, (p. 206, 3 ed. Waszink) that the *secunda mens* is the *anima mundi tripertita* shows, therefore, that the concept of a second Mind which contains the intelligible archetypes of individuals and the concept of the World Soul were finally equated. Nevertheless in my opinion Basilides solved the problem of the individual forms through his Stoic model: the universal seed contained obviously the ἰδίως ποιόν of everything and although he conserved in his system the figure of the World Soul, its function is scarcely relevant.

[58] Proclus, *In Tim.* 1, 303, 27 ss.

[59] Thus Barbelo, the male virgin who appears as a Trinity in most of the Gnostic tractates of the Nag Hammadi Library. She is the First Thought of the Father, and referred to her we can read in *The Three Steles of Seth* 7, 5, 121: "thou hast empowered the eternals in being, thou hast empowered divinity in living... thou hast empowered this (one) in knowing, thou hast empowered another one in creating..." (Translated by J. M. Robinson in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, *loc. cit.* 363). The role of this trimorphic Barbelo, as it has been pointed out by A. Wire in *NHL*, *loc. cit.* 443, is to make concrete the not being One in three different gradations, Mind, Life and Existence which are comparable to the Plotinian Nous, World Soul, and Nature, and I think, also to the Filiations of Basilides.

[60] We should remember that Basilides following the Platonic point of view attributes extreme beauty to his God. Basilides uses the word κάλλος (Hipp. *Refut.* 7, 22). Plotinus says the One is καλλονή (Plot. 1, 6, 6, 25. Cf. J. M. Rist, *loc. cit.* 53 ss.) We also find this assertion of the Supreme Beauty in God in the *Allogenes* 11, 3, 64.

[61] *SVF* 1. 134–41, 521; 2. 773–87, 796, 879, 885.

[62] *Gen. An.* 2. 3. 736 B 33 – 737 A 1.

[63] *Mot. An.* 10. 703 A 4 – B 2; *Gen. An.* 26. 744 A 1.

[64] Hippolytus certainly recognized the Second Filiation as a World Soul and the fact that in Plato's *Phaedrus* the soul is endowed with wings caused that he interpreted the Pneuma as a wing, although this interpretation does not appear in the words attributed to Basilides (Cf. Hipp. *Refut.* 7, 22).

[65] Plot. 4, 4, 13, 1. Nature is the active faculty of the World Soul, it is that which, added to Matter, gives it its substantiality. Nature is the lowest of the spiritual existence. All the commentators of Plotinus agree that there are two parts of Soul: one engaged in the eternal contemplation of its priors, the other has come down and created the world of material objects and particulars. Cf. J. M. Rist, *loc. cit.* 85.

[66] Hipp. *Refut.* 7, 25.

[67] Stoic concepts have been useful for Basilides in order to avoid the dualism god-matter. Nevertheless some confusion arises when Basilides tries to fit them in the Platonic frame of his Divinity.

[68] Chrysippus and Zeno accepted the idea that the inmediate cause of movement is weight or lightness, *SVF* 2. 434. Cf. D. Hahm, *loc. cit.* 57–90.

[69] The belief that God is unknowable through our senses or our mind is fundamental in Gnosticism. The knowledge of this hidden God constitutes the specific object of the Gnostic faith, because this knowledge, gnosis, is in itself the instrument of personal salvation. This aim can be reached either through a sacred and secret lore revealed by a Teacher or through inner revelation, the enlightement, the mystic ascent. This second way, more difficult, tended in some sects to be replaced by some definite rites and practices directed to promote and to assert the reception of the Spirit into the inner self. But the fragment of Hippolytus which tell us that Basilides claimed to have learned his doctrine from Matthias, does not make any mention of these theurgical practices in Basilides.

[70] G. Quispel, *loc. cit.* 128.
[71] R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane* (Oxford 1957), quoted by J. M. Rist, *loc. cit.* 213 ss.
[72] Clem Alex. *Strom.* 2, 3, 10.

Barcelona-7. Departament de Grec, Universitat de Barcelona, Gran Via de les Corts Catalanas, 585.